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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000286

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KFRD](#) [KIRF](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH KWARA GOVERNOR
SARAKI

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) Summary: On February 4, the Ambassador and DCM had dinner with Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) insider and member of President Yar'Adua's inner circle, Governor Bukola Saraki of Kwara State. Saraki discussed his views on the current political climate in Nigeria, the internal politics of the PDP, and voiced concerns about an increase in inter-religious violence in his state. End Summary.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

12. (C) Saraki expressed concern over the results of the recent tribunal rulings overturning gubernatorial elections, not because he supported the unseated candidates, but because of the effect they might have on the presidential tribunal in the next few months. However, the Kwara Governor said that he remains confident that the President will prevail, especially since earlier in the day, the presidential tribunal had turned down an application by the opposition Action Congress (AC) candidate, Atiku Abubakar, seeking to submit the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) official report on the 2007 elections into evidence. According to Saraki, the tribunal will take into account President Yar'Adua's dossier since entering office and will decide to uphold his election. Saraki added that in the unlikely event the tribunal annuls the election, the Supreme Court will reverse the lower court's ruling and uphold the President's election in the interest of national stability. The cost, monetarily and emotionally, of re-running the election would be too steep a price for Nigerians to pay, according to the Governor. However, Saraki noted to the Ambassador and DCM that international friends should not be concerned that Nigeria would follow and become like Kenya if the election is overturned. He explained that the tribunal verdict would not generate much violence because all the candidates competing are from the north. "It would be a different thing if there were Northern candidates competing with Southern ones; this would cause violence," Saraki explained.

PDP INTERNAL POLITICS

13. (C) As a member of the PDP, Saraki expressed concerns about the internal politics of his party in terms of leadership, including the National Executive Council (NEC), National Working Committee (NWC), and Board of Trustees (BOT). Saraki said there is pressure at the grassroots level to address leadership issues within the party and that people

will be watching closely the steps leading up to the conventions, especially the state-level party conventions, scheduled for February 28. (NOTE: In a separate meeting on February 11, former Senate President Ken Nnamani told the Ambassador that if events at the state conventions transpire badly, it will be a harbinger of more bad things to come. Nnamani added that he does not feel the PDP has been following its own constitution and if the conventions don't go well at the state level, it will be difficult for the party to move forward. END NOTE.)

RELIGIOUS TENSIONS IN KWARA?

¶4. (C) Religious tension in the North has become a new cause for concern in his state, Saraki cautioned. The governor conveyed surprise at just how palpable the tension has become, particularly in his home state of Kwara (which is located in the Middle Belt and is predominantly Yoruba Muslim). He suggested that any spark could set off an intense religious conflict, and explained that he constantly monitors the situation. Although Saraki could not pinpoint a specific cause for the increase in tension, he proposed that poor socioeconomic indicators, including a dilapidated educational system, may be aggravating circumstances. Saraki also said that a swell in public gatherings by both Muslims and Christians has generated circumstances where the groups "rub against" one another. The governor shared the examples of Christians complaining about the morning call to prayer disturbing their sleep; while Muslims expressed concern over the large Christian revivals organized in public spaces.

¶5. (C) Saraki described how all the governors meet regularly at a Governor's Conference in order to discuss their concerns

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and the issues that need to be put forth to the National Assembly or the President, with whom they meet quarterly. In discussing the many new governors, Saraki highlighted three whom he believed to be particularly progressive in dealing with the situation in the Delta: Delta State Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan; Bayelsa State Governor, Timipre Sylva; and Rivers State Governor, Rotimi Amaechi (NOTE: The Ambassador met with Governor Amaechi during her trip to Port Harcourt on January 29. Report on this to follow septel. END NOTE.)

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Comment: Mission continues to assess that there is a real, though unlikely, chance the tribunal will overturn the President's election. We agree with Governor Saraki that the Supreme Court, in particular, will weigh the need for stability and President Yar'Adua's track record as it makes its decision. We also agree with the Governor that Nigeria is not Kenya. However, we will need to see if he accurately points out that the tribunal decision, whatever it is, will not inflame ethnic/regional tensions since all candidates are from the North. Though we are aware of ongoing inter-religious strife in Bauchi and Kano states, Mission has not heard from other sources that religious tension in Kwara is running as high as reported by the Governor. However, as a Middle Belt state with a significant Christian minority and a large, sometimes volatile, influx of residents from elsewhere in Nigeria, Kwara certainly has the potential for inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflict. Post will continue to monitor and report on any signs of an upsurge in ethnic/religious unrest. End Comment.

SANDERS